Lancashire A

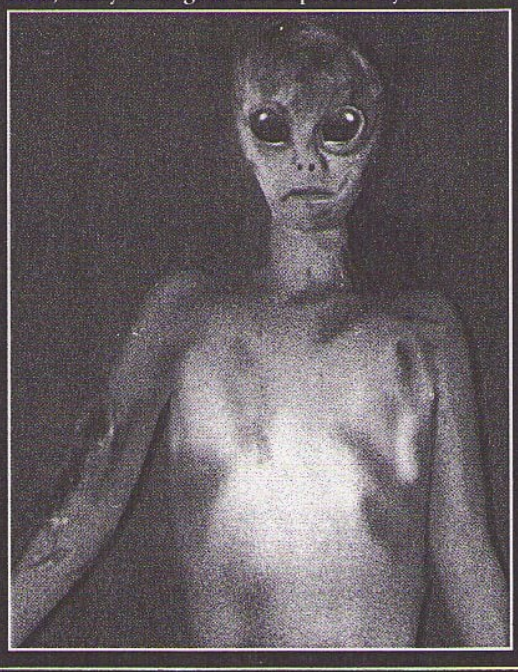
With so many possible fake stories of aliens and UFOs, it is refreshing to uncover a fake as it emerges and nip it in the bud before the people involved and the subject in general is discredited. Ian Davies squashes one of the biggest stories this year.

It's well known that you can stand at a bus stop for hours, and then three buses turn up at once. The real surprise, is that the same should be true for alien autopsy pictures. For decades, UFO researchers hoped for photographic evidence of alien bodies, but nothing came to light. Then, in 1994 the Santilli film, assumed to be film of the Roswell UFO crash victims from 1947, changed everything. Since then, there have been many photographs of dead aliens. The latest to cause a media storm were found in, of all places, a Lancashire hotel.

NORTHERN FLAP

This isn't so surprising, when you realise that Lancashire is currently a 'window' area for UFOs. Sightings are frequent, ranging from glowing lights and rolling wheels, to fast-moving black triangles reminiscent of the famous Belgian sighting. In one case, witnesses from Inskip reported seeing bunches of lights hovering in the distance, then at close range. This lasted for over an hour, until the lights were eventually chased by a fleet of helicopters. Just half a mile away, multiple witnesses claim to have seen an alien craft land on three occasions.

Although there are rumours of experimental military technology being flown from Warton air base, many Ufologists are impressed by the quality and quantity of UFO sightings in the North of Lancashire. The resulting excitement of this UFO flap has helped to fuel the efforts of the North Lancashire and Cumbria UFO Investigations group. Simon Lewis, Neil Hunter and their associates, work tirelessly to collect information, investigate sightings and watch the skies for alien craft. In all respects they have been successful, capturing UFOs on film and video, and collecting reams of information on local reports. When anybody sees a UFO in Lancashire and the Lakes, these are the people they turn to. This being so, they were the most likely targets, should anybody in the north want to leak secret information to them.



► One of the two 'aliens' which caused such a stir at this year's UFO conference in Morecambe.

THE TRAP WAS SET

The contact came during in February. To celebrate, explore and publicise the UFO sightings, the group organised a conference at the Headway Hotel in Morecambe, which was attended by many dignitaries of Ufology such as Jenny Randles, Chris Kenworthy and Marcus Allen. The press were present, as were TV companies, making it the perfect setting for a major revelation.

According to Simon Lewis, he knew that the alien photographs were going to be left at the hotel. The story goes that, in true *X-Files* style, Simon received a telephone call from a mystery man, tipping him off. Simon claims he was told by this man, that an "important package" was going to be left in the toilets of the Headway Hotel.

Refusing to spend the whole day in the toilets, Simon kept a straight face and organised a smooth and interesting conference. Another member of the group reports that Simon's brother was the one to find the photographs. They were in a plain, unmarked manila envelope. A ripple of excitement went through the conference when the announcement was made that a mysterious package had been found. The speakers said that if nobody claimed the package, it would be opened. Nobody owned up to having left it.

SECRET SERVICE LINK?

This was a fabulous piece of drama, because earlier in the day several speakers had talked about 'members of the secret services who are

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with us today'. When this paranoia was backed up by physical evidence, who could doubt the authenticity of the package's content? This style of revelation would fit in with previous leaks, such as the Majestic Twelve information. Some researchers believe that the 'powers that be', reveal UFO information gradually through direct leaks, as part of an education programme. Photographs and documents are left on trains, in dead-letter drops, or even in toilets.

The Lancashire Alien Body Photographs, published for the first time in **Encounters**, were said by Simon Lewis to show "male and female beings of some kind. One of them seems to be bruised and swollen around one eye. And the right arm is damaged and torn. One of them seems to have no nose."

EXCITEMENT BUILDS

The North Lancs UFO group kept the photographs to themselves for some time, until another conference was on the cards. In May, they revealed the photographs to the public, as the highlight of the day, immediately capturing the attention of the press. Within days, the photographs had caused a sensation. The internet was buzzing with rumours and demands for publication. The photographs were described as being "very authentic". People wanted to know what was going on. Could it be that proof of extraterrestrial existence was really at hand?

The BBC spent four hours with the Lancs UFO group, running two reports in one day. Newspapers created new *X-Files* sections, covering the range of paranormal phenomena in Lancashire, speculating on the importance of the images. It was like the summer of 1994 all over again. High expectations and a long wait for confirmation of proof.

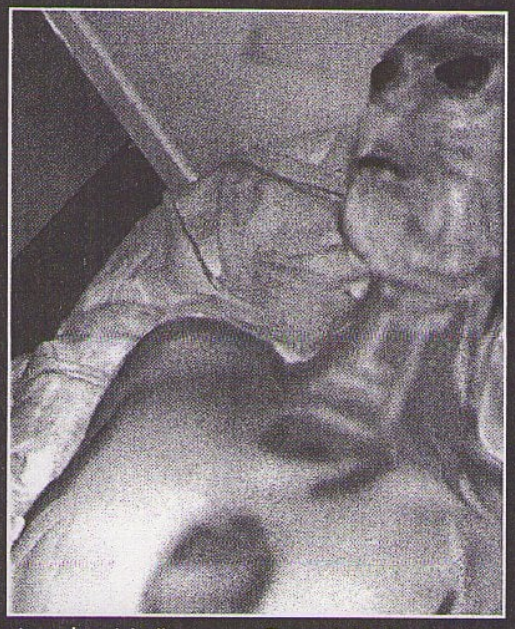
The problem with alien autopsy photographs is that they often turn out to be disappointing. With the Santilli film, rumours were spread that we would see full blown grey aliens, being watched over lovingly by President Truman. If only. The actual footage, although well produced in many respects, was regarded as a hoax by most people and Truman was never seen. Other photographs have turned out to be nothing more than reprints of exhibition photographs, or images of dummies used in alien movies.

The Santilli footage had the advantage of being linked to a specific, well-known UFO event – the Roswell crash. The Lancashire photographs had no such link, no background to give them credibility. Was it really possible that aliens were crashing so frequently that they would turn up in Lancashire? To the believers, it could only be presumed that, whatever the source for the photographs, the Morecambe hotel had been chosen so that the images would be in good hands.

REAL OR NOT?

In some cases the Lancashire photographs were met with muted scepticism. Timothy Good was shown the images, and according to Cath, of the North Lancs UFO group, he "refuses to be drawn on their authenticity". Apparently, nobody would say one way or the other, afraid of committing themselves. If they are another hoax, nobody wants their name tarred by saying they were genuine. There is always the fear of being left out, however, which may be why the Lancs group was enthusiastic. It was too good an opportunity to miss; these could be the real thing.

Rather than making Ufologists wary, past disappointments have made them increasingly eager for genuine proof. This is why the UFO group revealed the photographs to the world, as potential proof that something is out there. In one newspaper, Simon Lewis was reported as saying that the photographs, "could be one of the biggest revelations ever to hit the UFO investigation sphere". It is a shame then, that **Encounters** has to reveal conclusively that the photographs are a hoax.



▲ The second of the fake alien pictures that the BBC and national newspapers wanted to buy.

THE TRUTH

The hoaxer maintains that he never intended to deceive anybody, but he doesn't want his identity to be known, so he is using the code name 'Starling'. He has worked as a graphic designer, in the past, and his experiments with image manipulation led him to try his hand at autopsy pictures. It was, he says, something he did purely for the fun of it.

"It all started when I saw the first images form the Santilli film," says Starling. "They looked fantastic in many ways, and the stills were better than the moving footage. The problem for most

▲ Another fake, this time from the infamous Roswell film, the fictional one!

people, though, was that it looked like a deformed human. The effects people did a great research job incidentally, but it was a disappointment to many people, because they expected a classic grey alien, like something out of *Communion*. I wanted to create something recognisably alien."

Last summer, within days of seeing the Santilli alien, Starling set to work on his Power Macintosh. Using a Quick Take electronic camera, held above his own body, lying on a bed, he took a photograph of himself, half naked. He then removed the colour, used the KTP Glass Lens Normal filter to swell the eyes. It was then simply a case of blurring and adapting other parts of the head, to make it appear alien. Once the basic effect was created he added extra noise (a speckling effect), to artificially age the image. The whole process took less than ten minutes. If you look carefully, it's clear that the 'alien' is lying on a bed, with headboard, rather than an autopsy table.

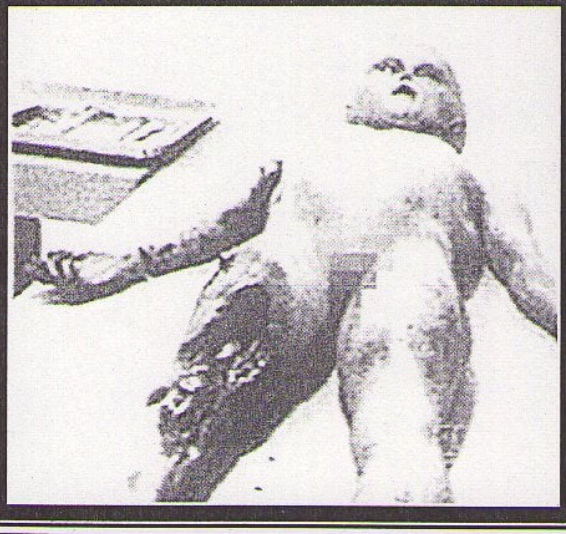
"It wasn't bad for a first attempt, but I didn't imagine it could ever cause a fuss like this," Starling says of the initial picture.

Almost a year later, on the eve of the Morecambe UFO conference, Starling created another alien. He used his own body again, which is quite distressing, because this is the one that most observers describe as female. "I accentuated the torso and altered the bone structure for a more feminine appearance. I was aiming for a genderless alien," he claims. "I also made a better job of the nose. On the first one, I removed it completely, which was probably a mistake." The second image is slightly better than the first, but again took about ten minutes, with nothing other than a basic Photoshop technique.

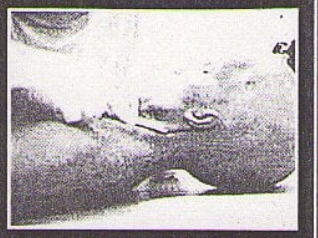
MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Although Starling has been involved with other hoaxes, he maintains that he never intended these photographs to be part of a public hoax. "For a start," he says, "I was handing copies of the first photograph round to people last summer, at various UFO conferences and parties. It was a sort of running joke. I even printed copies up on birthday cards and letters. Let's face it, if I was a secret agent, I'd keep the source of the image to myself. If I was trying to create a fabulous hoax, I'd have kept the image secret. As it is, there are lots of friends and acquaintances who have copies. There's no way I could have kept this secret for ever."

▼ This picture may or may not be a fake, it is of course from the Santilli Roswell footage.



Why then, was a mysterious phone call made to Simon Lewis, and how did the North Lancs UFO group come to own copies of the photographs? Starling claims



that it was all an accident. The creation date of the second photograph was definitely February 17th, 1996, one day before the infamous conference, which makes it seem likely that he was out to fool them. "Not at all," he responds. "I created the photographs to show to a friend of mine who I was meeting there, because we swop all sorts of UFO information and images, out of interest. I wanted to show him the images, to see what he thought. Due to their sensitive nature, I decided to get them out of my bag in the toilet, where I wouldn't be seen. Unfortunately, I dropped them while gathering other papers. They were then found by Simon's brother."

KEEPING QUIET

When the package was held up, Starling thought it best to keep quiet, rather than claim them as his own. "It wouldn't have enhanced my reputation. That place was crawling with conspiracy theorists, and freedom of information campaigners. They would have accused me of all sorts, if I'd been caught." He assumed that the photographs would be dismissed, rather than embraced. "In truth they weren't even photographs, they were printouts made on an ink jet printer. No film ever existed, only computer digits. I can't believe these images caused so much trouble."

If an accident like this can cause such a storm, it makes you realise that people who want to hoax, fool and cheat, have a relatively simple task. Their audience almost wants to be fooled. The public, along with UFO researchers, are so desperate for alien proof, that analytical procedures are pushed aside in favour of blind enthusiasm. For those of us who believe in genuine UFOs and aliens, there is a lesson to be learnt.

Recently, Starling discovered that the UFO group were about to hold another conference, to generate more publicity for the images so he tried to put a stop to it. He rang Simon Lewis, and using a voice distortion machine to disguise his voice, told him that keeping quiet would benefit Ufology. Thankfully, the conference was cancelled at the last minute, and Starling breathed a sigh of relief.

Those who doubt Starling's integrity may wonder how he can explain the phone call, from the mystery man who tipped off Simon Lewis the night before the conference. Starling laughs. "There was no phone call. Either Simon Lewis has been watching too many episodes of the *X-Files*, or he made this claim deliberately, to smoke me out. In which case it worked. Keep up the good work Simon."